That Stormy Night

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/26397712.

Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Category:
M/M

Fandoms:
Sonic the Hedgehog - All Media Types, Sonic the Hedgehog (Video Games)

Relationship:
Shadow the Hedgehog/Sonic the Hedgehog

Characters:
Sonic the Hedgehog, Shadow the Hedgehog

Additional Tags:
Shrinking, Tiny Shadow, Fluff, Fluff and Angst, Fluff and Hurt/Comfort, Giant/Tiny, Size Difference

Language:
English

Series:
Part 1 of Fics About Small Characters

Stats:
Published: 2020-09-10 Words: 8,304 Chapters: 1/1

That Stormy Night

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Summary

When Shadow forgets to replace his limiters/inhibitors before bed, his Chaos Powers leave him shrunk and out in the rain. When he takes shelter in someone's house after catching a cold, he realizes he chose the wrong house.

Or did he?

Notes

I wrote this with a lot of patience. I wanna know if you'd like to see this fic continue or if leaving it as a one-shot would be good.

This was the worst case scenario, and Shadow knew it. He never should have removed his inhibitors before bed.

Over the course of the day, he'd fallen from a window, gotten rained on, and his powers had stopped working. No use of Chaos Control was possible in his circumstances even with his rings off, and the vulnerability made him especially frightened, even if that fright appeared to others as extreme agitation.

Although fright certainly wasn't all that was present. The afternoon he spent evading a relentless stray cat through neighborhood after neighborhood left him sore and oddly winded. Then again, a creative means of travel was mandatory given his predicament, so he figured the changes in distance were merely a formality.

Since he'd woken up that morning, Shadow had found himself standing at a measly three inches high, just small enough that everything was now an uncomfortable hassle. Shadow didn't mind the exercise so much, but the tedium was something that killed any chance of the experience resembling anything that could be perceived as fun. If he'd had a friend near him, perhaps they'd be able to assist him in moving around, but he wasn't exactly fond of someone finding him like that. If he didn't expect Rouge to tease and play around with him, the hedgehog would have called her immediately.

Then again, his phone wouldn't have been of much use. It was protected in such a way so as to avoid anybody taking a peek at its contents. Several layers of security were in place, and there was no way that his phone could read a fingerprint when the panel was nearly the size of his face. He frowned at the flaw in government-issued technology for certain, but he knew that he couldn't stay mad considering how this new point of view was unforeseeable.

He sat beneath the frigid protection of a window well that loomed above like a square cloud. His body was shaking from the cold of the rain around him and his fur was soaking wet. He sniffled and subsequently let out a sneeze, a sound that resembled a tiny squeak and wouldn't be out of place from a squirrel.

He clasped his hands over his mouth and looked around for a moment, recognizing near-instantly how not-normal that sound was. Not necessarily the pitch, though he didn't think he could produce a sound pitched so small, but rather what it meant.

He carefully wrestled one of his gloves off and held his clawed hand

palm up against his forehead. Heat seemed to emit from beneath the fur of his brow and that only spelled bad news. He swallowed hard and realized he had to warm up and get his fur dry if he was going to avoid downright catching pneumonia. The fever was already enough of a warning to send him into concern.

After replacing his glove, Shadow looked up at the window again and paused as he noted a dull flickering from inside the house. It appeared that there was some source of fire inside,and Shadow nodded resolutely as he searched for an entrance. However, it seemed the only entrance was the window itself.

Fortunately for him there was a tree that grew close enough to jump to the window. All Shadow had to do was climb. Or rather, run.

Rearing back, the hedgehog prepared to rocket up the tree. He was fairly certain that the window was open since he could hear a gentle snoring inside.

He pushed forward, zipping up the side of the tree before jumping off the trunk and diving through the open window. He tumbled to the ground, aching a bit from earlier escapades but still decently unhurt. He shakily stood and ran beneath a chair before examining his surroundings.

The trappings of the room were only plain in places according to frequency of contact; there were no accents to the couch upon which a blanketed figure slept with a book over their face; the coffee table was simplistic with a glass top revealing a series of simple stone coasters; sweat dripped from the sides of a large drink from a fast-food joint. Yet strangely there were a few things that had to have cost more than their weight in money, such as the two elaborate bookshelves that framed the roaring fire with their deep ebony wood and their twisted pseudo-rococo designs. The hedgehog smirked- whoever this was, they wanted taste but they didn't require the genuine article to be satiated.

Shadow looked about before gliding to the next available safe spot which was directly beneath the person who lived there. He hoped to gradually make it to the fire, but as he let out a sudden sneeze, he heard the sound of the snoring stop. Quickly the black hedgehog hid again and hoped he wasn't caught.

"Shahra?" the occupant said, not even lifting the book. The sleepy voice clearly indicated that the person was not fully awake, and after a few seconds of silence, the gentle snoring started up again.

Shadow frowned, noting that the voice sounded familiar. He glanced back up at the open window and contemplated leaving to find a place less likely to end in embarrassment, but as his eyes locked onto the tree branches outside, he caught a flash which shortly preceded a bang so loud he could feel it shake the floorboards.

The black hedgehog jumped and tumbled over as he heard a sudden creak from above, and momentarily made a sharp shout as the heavy book that had been covering the occupant's face flopped a mere seven inches from where he'd been standing. He held his breath and hoped he wasn't spotted as he shrank back towards the wall.

A red shoe touched down next to the book, and a gloved hand gently took the tome from the ground. "Geez," the occupant said. "Was I really up that late?"

Shadow swallowed hard. The shoe gave it away but he knew Sonic's voice anywhere. "Son of a—"

Another thunder from outside prompted Sonic to canter towards the window. Shadow frowned and dashed to the leg of the couch, where he quietly panicked. If that window were shut, he probably wouldn't find a way out. With few options left, he shouted out to the middle of the room. "Don't!"

Sonic paused as his hand touched the sill of the window. "Huh? Who said that?" he said. The room stayed silent for a moment before he carefully slid the inner window down. "Must be hearing things, I can't believe I'm that tired."

Shadow couldn't frown any more than he already was but he wanted to. His only method of escape from the house was now locked tight and his rival was wide awake.

Sonic walked back and away from the couch. "Well, if I'm gonna sleep, may as well get some water while I'm up."

Shadow's relief broke over him as he realized that Sonic was going to go back to sleep. He didn't think that he could take being caught by him of all people. His seeming immaturity meant that if he were discovered, Sonic would have a field day with him.

Shadow carefully looked around to see if the coast was clear. Fortunately, the blue devil was nowhere in sight, and so he slowly emerged from his hiding spot before stepping towards the fire.

He didn't have to get too close to feel the heat, fortunately. Since it was built on a stone base, the heat from the fireplace traveled through the ceramic panels that lay before the mouth of it. Shadow carefully looked around again, checking to see if Sonic had come back in, but he was still gone.

Shadow knelt down and rubbed his hands together. He had to take in all the heat he could if he was going to get any better. "This is awful. Is this how other people live?" he quietly asked himself. "So fragile, so helpless… I never wanted to feel like this."

A creak from behind made the black hedgehog turn, and to his dismay his eyes locked directly onto Sonic's. The blue hedgehog had only gone up to get water to sleep on the couch again, but as he registered Shadow's presence, the glass of water slipped from his hand and shattered against the floor. His face was caught in an open-mouthed stare.

Shadow used the opportunity of the shattered cup to sprint past Sonic and into the kitchen. The bottom of the place seemed inaccessible, but as Shadow frantically watched his rival give chase, he forcefully pulled open a corner cabinet and clambered inside.

"W-wait, don't go in there, little fella!" Sonic shouted. "That's where my snacks are!"

Shadow paused as he took a breather behind a bag of chips. Sonic had only spotted him, perhaps there was still some time to escape before he was recognized.

He carefully ducked down further to avoid suspicion and collected his thoughts, however frantic they might have been. The teenager was sure to find him if he didn't have a plan. He began making notes of the different bags inside the cabinet, wondering if perhaps he could squirm his way into one without being noticed. *No,* he thought. *That would leave me vulnerable to getting spotted… or worse.*

Shadow's thoughts were cut short as the chip bag rose from in front of him, revealing a set of green hues staring directly at him for a moment. "A-ha! Gotcha!" Sonic said, reaching forward to grab him.

Shadow shouted and rolled away from Sonic's fingers before attempting to dash out of the cabinet. He wasn't going to let the teen come anywhere close to discovering what became of his rival. The thought of his fingers wrapping around home as enough to make the hedgehog feel sick.

He jumped down and quickly ran back towards the living room but suddenly had to stop as he slammed into something smooth and clear. The walls gave off a ear-bleedingly loud ring and radiated Shadow's heat back at him.

"Wait, this is…" he paused as he felt his breath bounce off the wall. He looked above, where Sonic's fingers gripped the top of the spare cup he was trapped in like he would a jar of pickles. Shadow quickly began banging on the sides of the glass prison as he felt a bad memory return to him. The capsule from his scarred past seemed to encompass him, and in a moment of weakness the tiny hedgehog slammed his fists against the glass with an anguished cry.

The cup tilted back and he tumbled to the bottom as Sonic stood up and gently walked to the living room. "Sorry, little guy, I can't have you running around my house eating my…" his voice petered out as his eyes fixed on Shadow.

The black hedgehog tapped his foot as he steadied himself. "Go on, I'm intrigued to see what excuse you have for catching me like this." His voice bounced off the glass walls.

"Shadow?" Sonic softly asked. He rubbed his eyes with his free hand as he examined his catch.

"Are you done staring at me?" Shadow asked, raising an eyebrow. "I'm not a bug, you know."

Shadow yelped as Sonic tilted the glass a bit. The blue hedgehog held a hand to his chin as he continued to examine Shadow. "You're a convincing bot, but Eggman can't fool me."

"A robot? You gotta be joki—" Shadow was cut short as he slid backwards into Sonic's open palm. He struggled to stand, but in an instant he didn't have to, as Sonic wrapped his fingers tightly around him. He could hear his own heartbeat as the pressure mounted, and as the air escaped his lungs from the squeeze, a short litany of curses erupted from his mouth.

There was a momentary pause before Sonic uncurled his fist, and Shadow gasped for air and coughed as he steadied himself on Sonic's palm. The heat from the skin below the fibers of his glove rose like a tiny fog around his ankles, just enough that the area where his legs were exposed felt the slightest sensation of warmth, and he wasn't sure whether he should blush or squirm.

Both, he thought. *This situation is both embarrassing AND uncomfortable.*

“I stand corrected,” Sonic said. “What happened to you?”

Shadow swallowed a lump in his throat and coughed a bit. “I think my Chaos Powers might have done this.” He wrung his empty wrists and frowned. “My inhibitors are too big for me and I feel…” he petered out, attempting to avoid the word “exposed”.

“Not that hard to feel vulnerable when all you wear are shoes and gloves,” Sonic remarked.

“Don’t throw stones,” Shadow chided, tapping his foot.

“Hey, I’m not tryin’ to,” Sonic replied. He raised a hand up around the tiny hedgehog and intently examined his head with his index. “Shadow, you’re shaking.”

“Shaking?” Shadow asked, his voice coming out a little louder than it should. He looked down at his hands and frowned, noting how each finger twitched out of sync with each other no matter how hard he tried to steady them. “You aren’t serious, right? You must be kidding.”

In truth, he feared that the hedgehog above him would detect the lingering concern he had about how long he’d be stuck like this. He’d already been stuck all day, who knows how much longer he’d be stuck with the knowledge that Sonic could- figuratively *and* literally- hold this fiasco over his head. But something was still off about this feeling he had. *Why am I shaking, if not for the compromising position?* he thought.

Sonic gently curled his hand around Shadow, who yelped in reply as his surroundings shook. “You’re shaking, you’re warm… you must have a fever!” he said, holding him closer. “How did you---”

A loud crash of thunder forced Shadow to jump and cover his ears, and his shaky balanced gait turned into a tumble off of the blue-blur’s hand. Sonic frowned and lunged slightly to catch the black hedgehog before placing his unoccupied hand over him like a dome. Shadow turned over as the light around him was momentarily extinguished, and he reached up and began pawing around as his eyes attempted to adjust to the light. “S-Sonic, this isn’t… I... “ his voice petered out as he felt the tightness of the walls close around him. The same feeling of being trapped inside that escape pod returned, harder than before this time since he could no longer see.

“Geez, relax,” Sonic replied, uncovering his hand. “Here, jump down.” He paused. “Sorry for being so sudden, I just thought of it on the fly.”

“Are you always that… impulsive?” Shadow said, slowly clambering off of Sonic’s hand and onto the cold surface of a kitchen countertop. “Why are we here?”

“Well, I gotta find some way to make you feel better,” Sonic said. “Can’t have you challenging me with a cold. That’s not a fair fight.”

“Have you not noticed that I fit into your palm now? How exactly am I supposed to fight you like… this? I mean, not that I couldn’t but…” He caught himself and sighed. “Look, I’m already upset enough that you caught me.”

“Well, feel lucky you got spotted, otherwise you’d be a lot worse off,” Sonic said, grabbing a tea kettle from the cupboard and dusting it off. “How long has it been since I used this? Oh yeah, the instant noodles from last month…” he thought aloud.

Shadow pursed his lips. “You eat more than chili dogs? You had me fooled.”

“The dogs are my standard, but I have snacks. Like spicy instant noodles,” he said. He turned on the faucet and began letting the water fill. “There’s this really spicy dog at the joint downtown, but it uses Carolina Reapers and when I tried it blind I…” the blue hedgehog caught himself and frowned awkwardly.

Shadow smirked. “You’re building a pain tolerance then? Seems like a waste of time.”

Sonic smirked back. “It’s only a waste if you only look at the goalposts and not the rest of the field.” With a twist of his wrist, the tap went dry and he carefully set the pot on the stove before turning back to face his little guest.

“Ironic of you to tell me to slow down and enjoy the journey,” Shadow scoffed.

“I’m only fast when I need to be,” Sonic replied. “Well, *and* when it’s actually a challenge.”

“Are you implying I’m a challenge then?” Shadow asked, raising an eyebrow.

Sonic put his hands on his hips. “As if. You couldn’t hope to beat me in a million years.”

“If you could be around that long, I’d take you up on that offer,” he half-heartedly replied.

Sonic frowned. “Shadow, I didn’t mean it like that, buddy, I just…”

“Please don’t talk about it,” Shadow grimly replied. “If you blubber about being sorry for any stupid mention of it, it will just be more disheartening than the content itself.”

Sonic paused, and for an instant, Shadow swore he saw something creep along the edge of the blue blur’s face. But the second he went to open his mouth, the two were startled by the teapot whistling. Sonic seemed to be in a bit more of a hurry to pick it up and turn off the stove, and Shadow wasn’t sure whether to feel clever for adding to Sonic’s awkward behavior or if he should have felt…

Apologetic? He thought to himself. *Why would I be apologetic? I said it exactly how it ought to be said.*

Shadow’s thoughts were interrupted as Sonic clattered ice into a small teacup. “Hopefully the water isn’t too warm,” he said, carrying it over and setting it next to his guest.

“Why are you acting like this?” Shadow asked.

“Whaddya mean?” Sonic replied.

“Like… why are you being so nurturing?”

“Nurturing? I’m just trying to make sure you get better,” he said. “Like I said before, having you sick wouldn’t be a fair fight, big or small.” He began gently pouring the hot water into the teacup, and Shadow could hear the crackling of the ice as it broke apart, a sound akin to fireworks at his new size.

He pursed his lips. “Don’t think that I owe you just because of this. You’re still a rival all the same.”

“Aww, c’mon, don’t be so moody,” Sonic teased.

“I’m not being moody, I’m just stating the obvious,” Shadow said. “A system of social credit is a recipe for disappointment.”

“Are you always this dull when we aren’t racing?” Sonic asked.

“Normally I don’t talk to people,” Shadow grumbled. “Are you done pouring? You’re going to spill it all over the counter.”

Sonic jumped and tilted the kettle back. “Oops,” he said, setting the remaining water aside. “It’s a little too high. Lemme just…”

Sonic picked up the teacup and took a short sip to remove some of the water. Shadow’s stomach swirled a little bit in unease as his captor swallowed. “I can’t go in there now,” he said.

“Huh? And why’s that?” Sonic replied. “It’s still really steamy.”

“Your mouth touched that, who knows where it’s been…”

“Hey, I brushed tonight,” Sonic said, offense dripping from his voice. “And It’s just water, it’s not a big deal.”

“I’m not going in that bath.”

Sonic set the teacup down. “I didn’t want you to overflow the tub when you got in, Shadz.”

“Don’t call me that,” Shadow said.

Sonic frowned and plucked Shadow from the counter by his waist, sending him into another round of frustrated shouting. He kicked and swore a little as he tried to jar himself from the tight grip of his rival’s fingers, tugging and pulling on the fabric with whatever strength he still had.

“Hey, shush!” Sonic said.

“Let go of me this instant! I’m not your plaything!” Shadow yelled. He struggled to unpin himself even more.

“Could’ve fooled me,” Sonic snarked.

Shadow angrily floundered until he grabbed ahold of Sonic’s index and bit down hard. The blue hedgehog sharply inhaled and released his grip, unaware that he’d dropped Shadow, now shouting from the sudden change of gravity, into the water.

Shadow splashed into the water and quickly breached the surface. The first moments of the water soaking into his fur stung a little, but it settled into a gentle heat. That didn’t stop Shadow from complaining though.

“You *dropped* me? Are you serious?” Shadow called. “My clothes are soaked!”

“Then remove them,” Sonic plainly replied. “That’s not gonna be a problem, is it?”

Shadow’s eyes narrowed. “You are not seeing me without my shoes, you’ll… you’ll steal them so I can’t easily maneuver.”

“Won’t the rockets jam up if you leave them in there too long?” Sonic asked, lowering his eye level to match Shadow’s.

There was a brief silence, followed by the black hedgehog grumbling as he wrestled off his clothes. He passively threw one of his shoes and hit Sonic in the nose with it.

Sonic flinched. “Hey, be careful with those!” he said. “I didn’t expect them to be that solid.”

“Oops,” Shadow said flatly. He ducked a bit into the warm water.

Sonic sighed. “At least you’re getting warm.” He carefully grabbed the teacup and walked back into the living room. He paused and pinched up each article of clothing, grinning as he rolled around and examined the rocket shoes between his fingers. *It’s kinda cute, actually,* he thought.

Shadow steadied himself in the water as Sonic lifted the cup. It was yet another impulsive moment, but at least the water slowed down the jerky motions. Still, at this rate he was still questioning if he could trick Sonic into opening the window- at least the world outside was relatively predictable.

No, he thought. *You don’t wanna run into a cat again.*

As Sonic came to the couch, he placed Shadow’s bath on the coffee table. “I should let Tails know in case this lasts longer than expected,” he said, reaching for a cell phone that was lying nearby.

Shadow’s eyes widened and he lunged forward from the bath. “Don’t!” he shouted.

Sonic paused and looked at him. “Is something wrong?”

Shadow caught himself and regained his composure before settling back into the water. “Don’t call anyone, please,” he said. “I’m already

in a rut as it is. Nobody else needs to know, at least not tonight."

Frankly, not ever, he thought to himself.

"Aw, don't say that," Sonic said, setting the phone back down. "Are you hungry? I can get you something if you want. I mean, it isn't like you could make much of a dent in my cupboard."

Shadow sighed. "I *suppose* it would be good to eat something," he grumbled.

Sonic abruptly stood up, a motion that briefly made the black hedgehog jump. "Alright, be right back. Don't get too lonely out here."

As Sonic left the room to gather some snacks, Shadow took a moment to adjust himself in the bath, and he thought out loud now that he was outside of earshot. "What am I doing? I'm bathing in a teacup, I'm being treated like a child…"

He gripped the rim of the cup and stood up in the water before carefully attempting to clamber out. As he placed his foot on the edge, the cup teetered, knocking him back into the water. "Ugh…" he groaned, breaching the surface and huffing. "This is just perfect…"

He stood up in the water again and looked around the room, now able to see from a little bit of a better angle. The first thing he noticed was on the couch in front of him- a thick brown book with gilded lettering that simply read *The Odyssey*. Shadow tilted his head- he didn't take Sonic for the reading type, or at least not anything quite so serious. As he continued to search about, he caught sight of a few small soda bottles perched beside the fast-food drink, whose condensation continued to drip onto the now identifiable onyx coaster, and Shadow could catch a hint of a sweet nectarine smell from inside the container.

A large crackle popped from the fireplace, and Shadow looked back at it quickly, not necessarily out of fright but simply because the sound took his attention. He stared into the fire for a while, carefully allowing his red eyes to soften their focus on the dancing pyre, and after a moment his eyes started to droop.

"Uh, Shadow?" Sonic said from behind. "Are you alright?"

The black hedgehog woke and pulled himself from his lazy posture. "You're back already?" he asked.

“You went to sleep for five minutes and I didn’t feel like wakin’ ya,” he replied, setting down a small tray with an assortment of small foods. “Sorry if I got anything you didn’t like, I’ve never actually seen what kind of foods you’re interested in.”

Shadow paused for a moment and eyed the tray. Sitting gently in it were a couple of grapes, a few pieces of sliced carrot, a few strawberries, some plain tortilla chips, and a small cut of salami. Shadow pursed his lips, unsure of what to say as he’d not parsed out an appropriate- or *characteristic*- response to such an act.

Sonic grinned, figuring the silence was indication enough, and carefully pulled out a few things he had at his side- a handkerchief and a bottle of soap with a pump. “You can’t just sit in the water, Shadz. Here, I can get you started,” he said. Carefully, he squirted a bit of the soap onto his finger. “Here, this should be plenty.”

Shadow looked away. “I’m just cold, not dirty. There isn’t a need for soap.”

Sonic frowned. “If you aren’t going to do it I’ll do it for you, you know.”

Shadow glowered at him. “You wouldn’t dare,” he grumbled.

The blue hedgehog smiled. “Well, you’ve been wandering outside in the rain, you probably have somethin’ on ya. Yep… there it is.”

“Water will do just fine,” the black hedgehog said. After a second of turning away, he felt a very hard press against the top of his head. “H-Hey, what are you--”

“There’s a spot that’s been bothering me since I first caught you,” Sonic said, trying to reach behind one of Shadow’s ears. He carefully pulled Shadow’s arms away from his index. “You have this spot on your head that’s caked in dirt and--”

“I am not a child, there’s no reason to--” As Sonic’s finger grazed the spot on his head, he felt a shudder go down his spine. He paused as Sonic gave him a smirk before continuing to rub at his head. “Sonic, don’t…” his voice petered out a bit.

Sonic put his free hand up to his mouth, trying to hide a small smile as he continued just… petting Shadow. The thought of that phrase was strange to him, but was stranger than any of that was the sound that Shadow didn’t even seem to be aware that he was making.

Shadow shot him a dirty look and grabbed his finger. “Are you done?”

“Sorry,” Sonic said. “I don’t think that’s something I’ve ever seen come from you.”

“Melting at someone’s touch? Please, it can happen,” Shadow said. *I remember it happening before,* he thought. *Seemed to be the only way she could get me to sleep...*

“No,” Sonic said. “You were purring. Like a cat.”

Shadow frowned and shuffled in the water a bit, trying to find a more comfortable position and avoid locking his eyes on his captor for a moment. “Well, when you choose *that* spot of all places, it isn’t exactly voluntary.”

Sonic reached his finger over again, but Shadow managed to swat it away. “Aw, c’mon Shadz, it’s kinda cute.”

Shadow bristled and hunched over, trying to present his spines a bitmore in defense. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but I’m not finding this situation amusing in the slightest. Could you please refrain from---”

“Alright, alright, no more touching your “feel better” button,” Sonic said, crossing his legs at the ankles.

“What would make me feel better is if I were my normal size instead of… *this,* ” Shadow replied, gesturing to his whole body. The last word seemed to drip with contempt, but not geared towards Sonic at all.

The hedgehog squeezed another drop of soap onto his finger and offered it to Shadow. The black hedgehog was hesitant at first, but silently nodded and scooped up as much of the soap as he could before brushing it through his spines with his fingers.

Sonic stood up and grinned. “Well, hopefully we’ll get you back to your good old self so we can have our races again. I don’t think it’d be fun racing against a fun-size hedgehog, after all.” He slowly began to walk over to a small dvd collection on the bookshelf to the right of the fireplace, directly beside the window he’d closed earlier. “We can watch a movie if you really want. It’s kinda stormy and loud, so drowning it out with something else might help keep you from getting too frightened.”

“Me? Frightened?” Shadow said. For someone the height of a thumb,

he was louder than ever. “You’ve gotta be kidding me! Thunder doesn’t scare me.”

A flash from the window made him clench his fist slightly.

“The lightning though?” Sonic asked, raising an eyebrow.

Shadow ducked under the water to wash himself off. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Sure,” Sonic said. “Keep telling yourself that.”

“I don’t need you to command me,” Shadow replied.

“You know, you’re still really mouthy for how small you’ve gotten.” Sonic sat back down, holding a couple movies in his arms. “Normally you aren’t so vocal.”

Shadow crossed his arms. “Last time I was vocal today I got caught and played with by a little girl who didn’t know the meaning of personal space.”

“Hopefully she didn’t break anything.”

“No, thank goodness,” Shadow said. “I don’t think I would have outran that cat. What a sorry end that would have been.” He shuddered at the thought of it before attempting to change the subject. “Anyways, movies.”

“Alright, Shadz,” Sonic said, setting the boxes down on the table. “We have a sappy love story about a man who disappears and years later has to save the love of his life from marrying a nasty jerk of a prince, we have an animated movie about a beetle dad trying to locate his lost son and fearing the worst has happened, or we have…” he gently set the last one down, and that one was the closest to Shadow. “The first movie in a fantasy series I’ve been getting into.”

Shadow paused and looked over the options available. The first option wasn’t necessarily a fantasy story but was at least a chivalric tale. “Why do you have a medieval romance? Aren’t you disinterested in that sort of thing?”

“Amy left it here a while back and I decided to check it out. I know she probably did it because she wanted me to emulate that sort of thing, but…” Sonic paused scratching at his cheek. “I guess the real plot twist was that I actually found the movie to be funny.”

“I don’t know.” Shadow glanced at the next one. “Isn’t that just a rehashed, kid-friendly version of—“

“The Odyssey?” Sonic asked. “Yeah, pretty much. Is it that easy to tell from the box art?”

“Yeah, I think I’ll pass on the kid movie,” Shadow grumbled. He adjusted himself in the bath, which was starting to cool down.

“Then I guess that leaves this one,” the blue blur said, pointing to the fantasy film. “Are you sure this is the one you want?”

“Why wouldn’t it be?” Shadow asked. “It’s good, isn’t it?”

“It’s a cult classic, but reviewers were really skeptical when it first showed itself in public,” Sonic explained. “This is *exactly* why I don’t care for critics anymore.” He paused, embarrassed about sharing that opinion so freely. ”That isn’t what I meant, though.”

“Then what did you mean?”

“There are certain… subjects, I guess? Ones that you probably don’t wanna see.”

“Oh c’mon, I’m not a baby,” he said. He stood up and pointed to the handkerchief. “I need to get out, the water is getting cold.”

Sonic grabbed the handkerchief and draped it over his hand, and Shadow immediately regretted voicing his desire to end bathtime. Quickly, he ducked back into the water. “On second thought, who needs to be dry?”

Sonic raised an eyebrow and smirked. “Relax,” he said, offering his free hand. “Take your time, we’ve got all night.”

Shadow cautiously rose from the water and looked around. No surprises, no fingers waiting to grab him- just an open palm and a smiling blue hedgehog above him.

Shadow lifted himself over the rim and flipped onto Sonic’s gloved hand. “Well, I suppose that’s another thing off the bucket list.”

“You don’t even have to kick the bucket,” Sonic said. “I wish I had all that time. There are so many fun things to do in the world and I’ll never get to do *all* of them. Kinda bums me out, but I’m fast enough to get the ones that matter.”

“No, you don’t wanna live forever, Sonic,” Shadow said. His voice held a bitter tone. “Living forever isn’t fun at all. Everyone just…”

Sonic draped the cloth over his index and began rubbing at Shadow’s head again. Shadow’s protests were muffled beneath the handkerchief, but seemed to be much shorter. Sonic smirked, but then his expression went to one of surprise as he felt pressure against his fingertip from Shadow’s head. The purring continued from where it left off.

Shadow gripped the rest of the handkerchief and began gently drying himself off. “Sonic…” he muttered, still partially muffled by the cloth.

The blue hedgehog lifted his finger away. “Yes?” he asked.

Shadow paused, swallowing hard as he struggled to find the proper words. “I…”

“You don’t have to thank me,” Sonic said. “I know you’re a grump, but somehow I figure you’d probably do the same if I were running in your shoes.” He awkwardly frowned. “Er, I mean skating.”

Shadow nodded. “Mm.”

Sonic grinned. “Though I don’t think you’d be keen on just letting me run around, would you?”

“Not in the slightest,” Shadow replied. “I’d get a cage or a tank or something.”

“Hey, that’s not very nice!” Sonic replied.

“What, you’re keeping *me* like a pet! Carrying me around everywhere, picking me up at inopportune moments, giving me a bath, just... hanging out…” His voice petered out a bit as he said that last one, noting that he didn’t feel he was describing a pet anymore.

“That’s not because I think you’re a pet, Shadow. It’s because I don’t want you to get hurt.” Sonic looked away for a moment. “If your powers aren’t working, who knows if you can even heal? You could get crushed. Then who’d be the second fastest?”

“Well, *you* are right now, so…” Shadow said.

Sonic pouted. “You’re not even that fast without your shoes!”

“Well, you can’t harness Chaos Control like I can,” Shadow said. “What point are you trying to pull here? Are you really gonna argue

with a tiny hedgehog right now?"

Sonic sighed. "Sorry, this isn't the time to be trash talking, is it? I mean, you've already been through a lot, and that's just what I can tell."

"Yeah, getting blown out the window somehow didn't kill me, nor did getting chased down by a cat," Shadow said.

"You couldn't outrun it?" Sonic said.

"I did several times, but they're hunters- it kept tracking me down. And because I can't use my powers I never had a meaningful chance to gain any altitude."

Sonic nodded and placed his hand down on the coffee table. Shadow jumped off and looked at him. His head poked out from the handkerchief that he had wrapped around him like a duvet, and Sonic couldn't help but stifle a noise he had the impulse to make.

"Alright, eat up. I gotta go wash this cup out," Sonic said. "Don't do anything reckless."

Shadow watched as Sonic left the room. He was still so uncertain as to why he was mellowed out this much. This was a side to the blue blur that Shadow never really saw, and the massive difference put the black hedgehog into a state of unease at the thought that it could all be an act to drop his guard. *But then again,* Shadow reasoned, *what would he even have to gain from that? I'm already pathetically small as it is.*

The sweet aroma of the strawberry on the table drew his attention, and he began to walk over to the tray slowly, dragging the handkerchief with him along the way. As his bare feet made the transition from the lukewarm wood of the table's frame to the cold central pane of glass that made of the vast majority of the table's surface, a shudder ran down his spine and he drew his foot back a bit. But then he tried again, front of the foot first, and then the heel, and then he shifted his weight.

Shadow pulled the cloth even tighter and began carefully making his way across the cold surface until he reached the plate. He ran his hand along the strawberry, feeling the bumpy seeds on its surface as his claws gently grazed the flesh of the fruit. Carefully, he picked out one of the seeds and popped it into his mouth, crunching it against his back teeth. It wasn't necessarily a bad taste, but it was too bland in its

own. So with a firm resolve, he looked around to make sure Sonic was looking before digging his hands into the strawberry.

A memory hit him with the taste of that fruit. It was his birthday- well, one-month anniversary of being alive. He was in the observation deck waiting at his usual time to talk to Maria, when she brought him a gift. He hadn't known yet how gratitude worked, and when he expressed this, she'd taught him that the expression was "Thank You."

When he opened it, he was shocked to see it was a can of her favorite strawberry lemonade. The last can of the shipment, in fact. He felt bad for a moment before Maria had told him not to apologize, and that she wanted to share something that made her happy with some *one* that made her happy.

Shadow's tears were a mix of sorrow and joy as he wasn't sure which to feel. On one hand, this was the third memory that had hit him. On the other, something felt different this time. Maybe it was the fact that he'd torn through an entire strawberry like it was nothing, maybe it was because the smell of the drink above wasn't at all nectarine and he now recognized it distinctly. Or maybe…

Shadow's thoughts were interrupted as Sonic returned with a tiny box and a bowl of popcorn. "Geez, Shadow, didn't think you could demolish anything on that plate!"

Shadow puffed out his chest a bit. "Shows what you know," he said with a prideful smirk.

Sonic's gaze softened a bit as he set the box down on the table. "Sorry if it's a little too much, but I wanted you to have a proper place to sleep instead of being stuck on the table. I can usually sleep on hard floors but I didn't know if you could too."

Shadow wandered up to the box, where a few more handkerchiefs were neatly folded and tucked. He could sleep on hard surfaces as well, but it was definitely going to be less comfortable than a bed. "I…"

"Is something wrong?"

"No!" Shadow blurted. He put a hand over his mouth.

Sonic chuckled. "I'm glad. Hopefully you can get the rest you need."

Shadow brought his hand back down and, after moving to the plate, carefully grabbed a tortilla chip, which for him was about half the size of his body. He crunched down on it and looked to his blue host. “Are you going to play the movie or not?” he asked with his mouth half full.

Sonic snapped out of the daze he had just having stared at Shadow and nervously chuckled. “Right!”

As Shadow watched Sonic stand up and open the dvd case, he couldn’t help but notice a strange glow the hedgehog had to his eyes in the firelight. The orange of the flames highlighted everything in his eyes that was white, leaving an even more stark contrast with the green parts of his eyes. They were soft, too- it wasn’t the usual determined look he’d always seen out and about- there was something more controlled and more contemplative behind that gentle gaze.

Shadow felt something warm against his cheeks and he bitterly swallowed. The fever was flaring up and in response he frantically looked around for a solution. Then he remembered that the ground was cold, and resorted to laying down on the glass, completely obscured by his blanket. He paused as he got a better whiff and realized that the handkerchief smelled of grape-flavoring.

Sonic returned but saw that the handkerchief was now sprawled and Shadow was nowhere to be seen. “Aw, man, did he seriously bolt on me?” he asked aloud.

A sneeze from beneath the handkerchief gave the blur the answer. He gingerly pinched the edge of the cloth and pulled it up, revealing a tiny Shadow pressing his body into the cold glass. Sonic did his best to not laugh. “What are you doing there, Shadz?”

Shadow didn’t even register the nickname. “My fever spiked, I’m just trying to regulate my temperature.”

“Lemme check,” Sonic said, plucking Shadow from the table. Like clockwork, Shadow struggled in his grasp, but he was surprised when he was immediately dropped into the other hand’s open palm. “Alright stand up,” the blue blur commanded.

Shadow teetered a bit as he stood, and Sonic put a finger up against his head and waited a few seconds. “Well?” Shadow asked.

“Yeah, that’s not a fever,” Sonic said. “Must’ve stopped right on cue, huh?”

Shadow frowned and looked away for a second. “S-Sure,” he muttered. The hot feeling on his face still remained.

As the boisterous music of the DVD menu played, Sonic offered his guest a piece of popcorn. Shadow shook his head and hopped down as Sonic lowered him back to the table. “I have to finish the tray first.”

“Pal, I don’t think you could finish that without overeating. It’s fine, I can clean it up if you need to.” He carefully plucked up a grape and popped it into his mouth. “If you want, I can help.”

Shadow frowned. “You just made popcorn, eat your own food.” He grabbed a different grape and began tearing away at a section of the skin.

“That’s a weird way to eat a grape,” Sonic said.

“You don’t peel the skin off?” Shadow asked.

“No, the skin’s what really makes it. It’s like biting into a water balloon. Well, you know, *without* that much water.”

“Normally I’d offer to give it a go, but I think everything’s changed now that I’m this small,” the black hedgehog said. “Everything’s a little harder to chew, too.”

“Geez, I’m sorry,” Sonic said, trying to be sympathetic.

“Don’t be, you didn’t do anything wrong and you didn’t get me into this mess,” Shadow said. He peeled away the top section of the grape’s skin and bit into it. “I’m just glad I have *something* to eat at all.”

“Good thing you got caught, huh?” Sonic asked.

Shadow was too busy chowing down on the grape to answer. Sonic grinned all the same and began menuing through the DVD’s features as he patiently waited for Shadow to finish.

“So,” the blue hedgehog asked, “you ready to go?”

“Almost done,” Shadow replied. He quickly finished his treat and looked up at the TV in front of them. “I think my neck is gonna get strained watching it from here.”

Sonic leaned forward. “The couch, maybe?” he said.

Shadow walked over to his clothes and pulled his black socks over his

feet, having grown tired of the cold glass. “Scoot to your left.”

“Huh?” Sonic asked.

“Your left,” Shadow repeated.

“No, I heard you. Why though?”

Shadow reared up and flung himself across the gap and onto the couch, and Sonic instinctively moved aside. The black hedgehog rolled and stopped before getting up. “See? Still got it.” He looked up at the television. “Mm, still no good.”

Sonic grinned. “I know a place you could sit. Pretty good view, too.”

“Oh? Uwaagh!” Shadow shouted, cut short by Sonic plucking him up around the middle. “Let go of me, I’m not—“

He stopped as he was gently set down in the peach fur of Sonic’s chest. “Why here?” he asked, embarrassed.

“Figures my view and your view would be similar,” the blue hedgehog replied.

“Hmm,” Shadow stood and looked up at the screen. He wasn’t wrong. “I suppose it’ll have to do.”

Sonic shot him a smirk. He began leaning forward, holding Shadow in place against his chest as he grabbed a few things from the table and set them down next to him. Shadow kicked a bit but paused as he felt a familiar throb beneath the blue hedgehogs fur- the sound of his heart beating as steady as a war drum. He paused and listened for a moment before continuing his grunting. “Sonic, this isn’t— I’m not…”

He flopped backwards onto his hand before being flopped back towards onto Sonic’s fur. “Sorry little buddy,” Sonic said. “I could t just let you starve.” He placed the plate and the handkerchief next to him on the couch and offered Shadow a small piece of cheese before pressing play.

Shadow hugged as he listened to the crunch of popcorn behind him followed by the sickening swallow that succeeded it. He realized that Sonic needed to eat too, but… “Hey, could you keep it down?” Shadow asked. “That swallowing sound is kind of gross..”

Sonic frowned and simply jacked up the volume so that his crunching

was more difficult to hear. Shadow sighed and continued watching.

As the next hour passed, Sonic watched as Shadow went from bored to curious to intrigued. It was strange seeing him this invested in something, but Sonic figures that if he got into it maybe another day when he got back to normal they could finish the series.

Shadow shouted loud as the twist came up and his tiny figure quickly stood as he gestured with both of his arms. “I knew it! I knew there was something off about her from minute one and yet I had no idea it would be that deep!”

Sonic snickered.

Shadow turned around and angrily stared at him. “What’re you laughing about?”

“Nothing,” Sonic insisted as he paused the movie. “I just… I had no idea you’d get *this* into the movie.”

Shadow paused and blushed. “I mean, wouldn’t anybody? It’s a good movie,” he said.

“I mean, it’s alright, they didn’t having the acting down yet,” Sonic said.

“Oh, no, that much is clear,” Shadow said. “But the storytelling…”

Sonic smirked. “You’re enjoying this aren’t you?”

Shadow scoffed and sat back down. “Just resume it before I give you a quarter-value swear,” he said.

Sonic rolled his eyes but continued, and almost immediately Shadow became entrenched in the plot again. But by the time the movie ended, Shadow could sense something was off. He handed Shadow the last piece of food on the plate- a grape- and offered it. Shadow pushed it away as he pulled his knees closer.

“What’s wrong?” Sonic asked. “Don’t tell me it’s about—“

“Of course it is!” Shadow said. “The movie was great, but… Laile’s story was a tragedy. I mean a demon attacked him and his sister threw herself in front of him. Watching her die like that…”

Sonic felt another tremble from Shadow. He was clearly shaken by what he saw. At first Sonic wasn’t sure how to console him, but he

then reached up and began stroking the spot behind his ear.

“Sonic, don’t do…” the tiny hedgehog’s voice trailed off and his body relaxed a bit. “Sonic…” he tried again, but the rhythm of Sonic’s finger against his head made it difficult to finish his sentences.

Sonic smiled. “I take it you don’t wanna watch any more?” he said, stopping his scratches.

Shadow’s voice remained calm. “I never said that.”

“Good, because this disc is a double-feature one.” Sonic pressed play, and the two of them made their way through the sequel. Though Shadow was entrenched for a while, but it wasn’t long before he went from sitting up to laying down, and from awake to asleep. Sonic paused the movie and kicked back on the couch.

Shadow had fallen asleep with his face buried, and while the blue hedgehog couldn’t help but smile, he also had to be a good host. Gently, he reached over and pulled the handkerchief from beside him. Attempting to make no sudden movements, he folded the square until it could cozily fit over the tiny guest and laid it on top of him. Shadows fingers gingerly gripped the stitching of the edge of it, and Sonic tried again to stifle a small “aww” caught in his throat.

“Goodnight, Shadow,” he said instead, and within a few minutes, both of them were off to sleep.

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